EPIC COMICS

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ELEKTRA™

Assassin

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ELEKTRA Assassin

—THE LOST YEARS—

MYSTERY WOMAN SURVIVES DROWNING, KILLS TWO

SAN CONCEPCION, South America—An unidentified woman survived drowning in San Concepcion Bay and killed two local police officers, witnesses say.

A source in the police department disclosed that the woman was found on the beach yesterday morning, suffering from rope burns on her wrists and ankles, and a deep gash on her thigh.

A local man claims to have seen the woman strike down two police officers with her bare hands, before being subdued.

Local authorities refused to draw any connection between this incident and the recent assassination which took place in San Concepcion.

The woman's present whereabouts have not been revealed.

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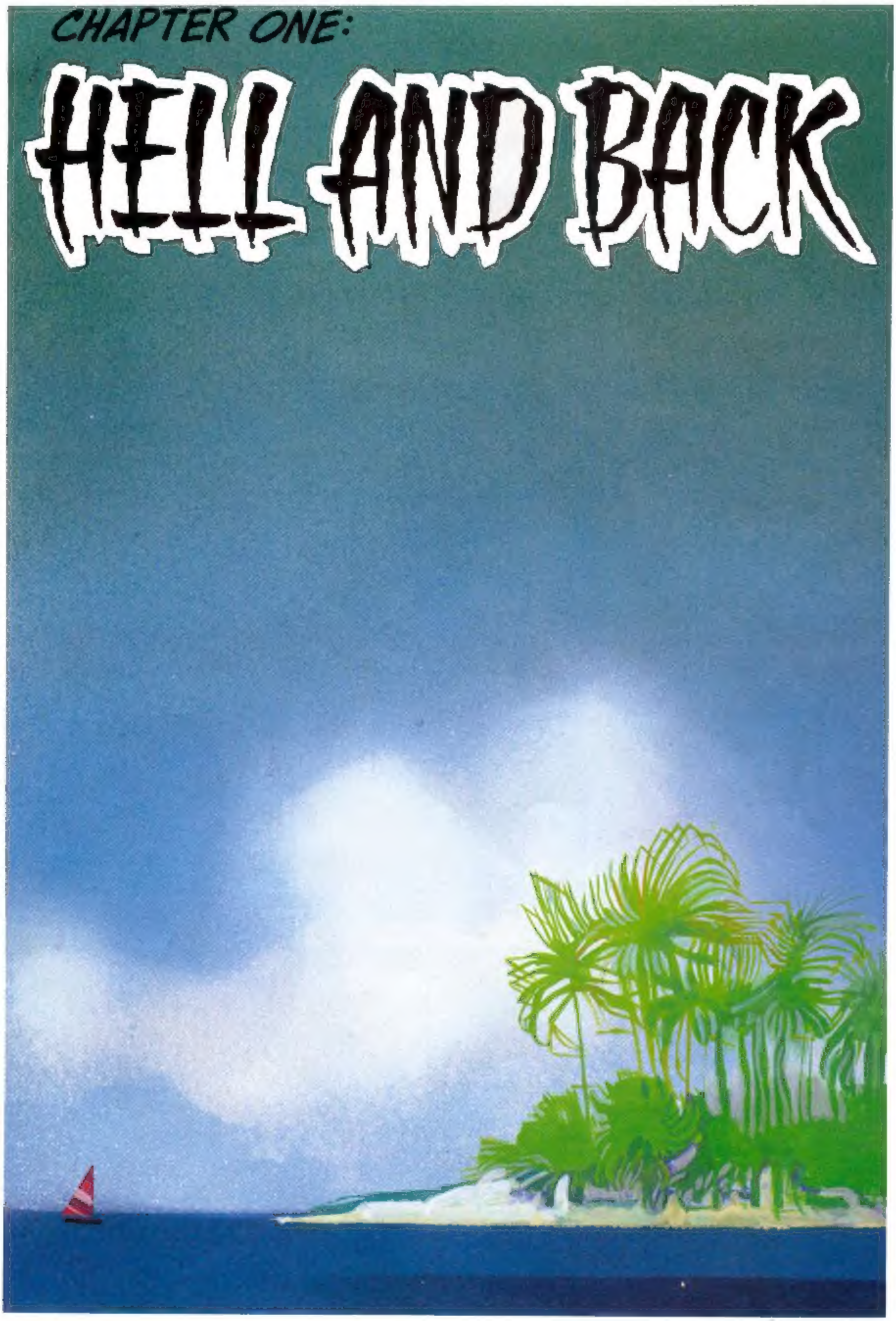
CHAPTER ONE:

HELL AND BACK



THIS ONE IS **WORN** AND **DULL** LIKE AN OLD **COIN.**

BUT **PATCHES** HERE AND THERE STILL **GLINT.** IF I RUB THEM VERY **CARE-FULLY** I CAN MAKE THEM SHINE.

THIS PATCH... I AM RIDING ON A **BOAT** IN MY MOTHER'S **STOMACH.**

POPPA **TOUCHES** HER...

...AND **ME.**

THE **AEGEAN ISLANDS** ARE **NEARBY.**

IT IS SHORTLY BEFORE **NOON** ON AUGUST **THIRTEENTH.**

THESE ARE THE **FACTS.**

THEY ARE WRITTEN ON MY **BIRTH CERTIFICATE.**

I MAKE A PICTURE TO CHECK.

CERTIFICATE OF BIRTH

YES.

STILL THIS ONE **SPINS--FASTER** NOW, TOO FAST--

--BECAUSE I WAS MAKING **PICTURES** AND NOT PAYING **ATTENTION--**

--I MUST **SLOW** IT--

--EGGBEATER EGGBEATER--

--OR MISS THE CHANCE TO MAKE IT **SHINE.**

OH- here comes trouble.....

DAD AND His wife here.

EGGBEATER.

SHE IS **CLYTEMNESTRA.** **HE** IS **AGGAMEMNON.**

I THINK I MISSPELLED HER **NAME** BUT THAT IS **UNIMPORTANT.** IT IS **NOT** HER REAL NAME. I **GAVE** THEM THOSE NAMES--PICKED THEM FROM A **STORY** POPPA READ ME.

THEIR REAL NAMES WERE **BURNED** AWAY...

--BY THE **GREASY** MEN THE FAT GREASY MEN WITH THEIR FAT GREASY LOUD **MACHINES** THEIR **PUNISHING** MACHINES--

ZZTTTT

KKZZTT--

--THAT SMELL LIKE **OLD CAPS** AND RUN **LIGHTNING** THROUGH ME--

--BUT I MUST NOT BE **DISTRACTED.** THE **PATCHES** COME--

--SHORTLY BEFORE **NOON** ON AUGUST **THIRTEENTH**--

--ON THE SIDE OF THE **HELICOPTER** A **MAN** HOLDS AN **UZI**--WHICH IS **NOT** AN ITALIAN **DRINK.** IT IS A **GUN**--

--THE GUN **SPITS**--

--POPPA **FEELS** IT LIKE THE PUNCH OF A **FIST**--

BULLIT HOL HERE

BLOOD

SAPRISE

--AND THEY FIRE **AGAIN**-- LIKE A DOZEN **ICICLES** THROUGH HIS CHEST-- THE BLOOD **FROTHS** AND **GURGLES** HE **TASTES** IT AND **BREATHES** IT--

--NO.

A LOTS MORE BLOOD

HAIR

HAIR

AAAGR BLOOD

TWEET

TWEET

TWEET

NO. I MUST NOT **CHANGE** IT. HE IS SHOT **ONCE.** THEN HE **SITS** AND LOOKS **STUPID.**

HE IS **NOT** SHOT AGAIN.

MOTHER IS. THAT IS HOW IT HAPPENS.

MOTHER IS NOT QUITE CUT IN TWO.

MOTHER IS SHOT IN THE HEAD AND CHEST.

NOT IN THE STOMACH WHERE I AM.

JUST SECONDS BEFORE NOON ON AUGUST THIRTEENTH--

--EGGBEATER EGGBEATER EGGBEATER--

--SHE IS COLDER INSIDE THAN OUT-- HER SPINE CANNOT STOP MOVING LIKE A SNAKE--

--AND HER HEART CANNOT START--

--HER LEGS ARE NUMB BUT SHE FEELS THE CONTRACTIONS...

NOON ON AUGUST THIRTEENTH.

HER DEATH RATTLE FADES AS I SCREAM.

HE SWEARS I WILL ALWAYS BE SAFE.

I AM SAFE NOW, POPPA.

NOTHING SHINES HERE.

EXCEPT THE GLOBES AND I HAVE TO MAKE THEM SHINE OR THEY JUST SIT IN THE AIR IN FRONT OF ME, SPINNING--

--EXCEPT THE BLACK ONE NEVER SPINS--

--BUT IT IS UNIMPORTANT--

--TOO QUICKLY FOR ME TO SEE ANYTHING ON THEM -- EXCEPT NOW AND THEN A SPARKLE.

THE GLOBES HOLD ALL THE MEMORIES THAT HAVE SURVIVED THE BURNINGS. THEY ARE EVERY COLOR--

--AND BLACK--

--TO SEE THE MEMORIES I SLOW THE SPINNING. MOSTLY THEY ARE DULL AND DEAD--

...BUT THE SPARKS--

--EACH ONE IS A SHINING PLACE.

A PLACE WHERE I HAVE FELT ALIVE...

...I AM FIVE YEARS OLD.

THE WINDOWS RATTLE, AND I AM AFRAID OF WHAT LIES OUTSIDE.

THE DOOR TO MY BEDROOM OPENS.

YOU STAND OVER ME LIKE A GREAT OLD TREE, POPPA. ONE THAT HAS HELD BACK THE WIND FOR AGES AND NOW WOBBLES, WEARY.

YOU SAY MY NAME. YOUR VOICE IS THICK.

YOU TELL ME YOU LOVE ME. YOUR BREATH SMELLS LIKE WINE. YOU LIFT THE SHEET FROM ME AND--

NO.

THE PILLS AND THE LONG, LONG TALKS YOUR FRIENDS GAVE ME--THEY SHOW ME I AM WRONG.

THEY SHOW ME I MADE THAT UP. YOU NEVER...

THEY TELL ME I WANTED YOU TO.

I ONLY KNOW I WANT TO FEEL SOMETHING.

I DO SOMETHING BAD--

BBZZZZZ
--AND THEY KEEP ME IN A PLACE LIKE THIS ONE BUT CLEANER.
THEY SMILE AT ME UNTIL I SMILE BACK.

BZZZZZT
THEN THEY SEND ME BACK TO YOU, POPPA.

I AM NOT-- IN THIS PLACE--

I AM--ON A SUNNY ISLAND--

I AM NOT--CRUSHED AGAINST COLD GREY BODIES--

I AM--ALONE-- WITH POPPA--

--SITTING ON HIS KNEE--

--SIX YEARS OLD--

THERE IS--NO FAT PIG OF A MAN--

--POUNDING ME WITH WATER--

--THERE IS ONLY POPPA-- ASKING ME IF I WANT A PET--

--ASKING ME-- TO NAME MY FAVORITE KIND OF PET--

--I TELL POPPA THAT I WANT A CAT.

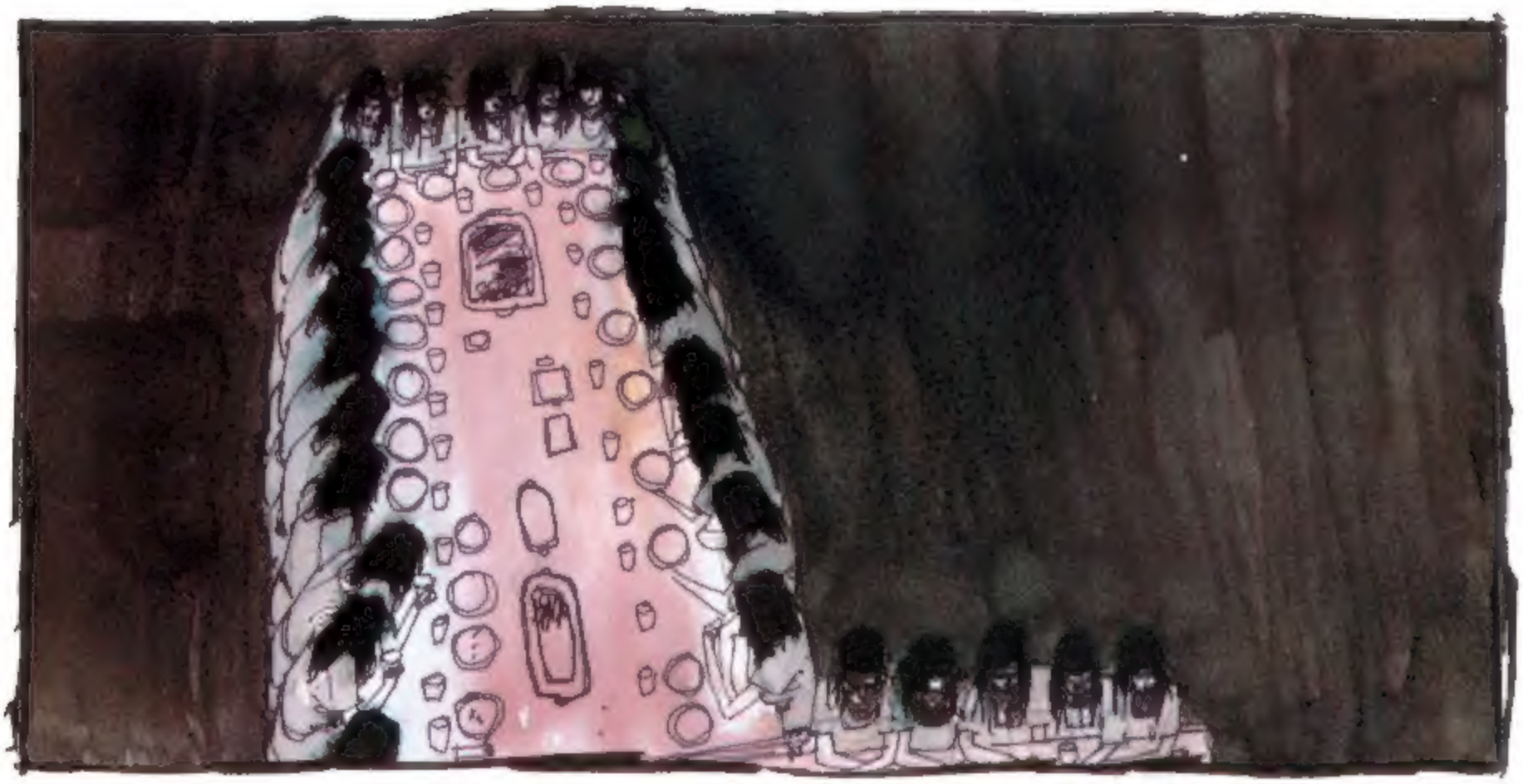
POPPA LAUGHS.

"YOU ARE A CAT," HE SAYS.

"A CHESHIRE CAT."

HE READS ME A STORY.

IT MAKES NO SENSE.



THIS ONE I SHOULD NOT WATCH.

NOT AGAIN.

ITS SHINE IS SOFT AND WARM AND I SHOULD NOT WASTE IT.

NOT YET.

I AM TWELVE YEARS OLD.

SWEAT BREAKS ACROSS MY CHEST, MY HEART POUNDS. MY LIMBS ARE STRONG. BREATHING IS HARD AND PAINFUL AND JOYOUS.

SENSEI IS WISE. HIS WORDS ARE CALM. I AM HIS FINEST STUDENT.

POPPA IS HAPPY. SENSEI IS PLEASED.

I HAVE FOUND SOMETHING TO FEEL, AND I SHINE WITH IT.

I MUST NOT WASTE THIS ONE.

BUT **THIS** ONE -- **THIS** ONE **NEVER** FADES. IT JUST SHINES **BRIGHTER** LIKE A **LASER** ALL **COLD** AND **SHARP** AND **CLEAN** AND **CRUEL**, AND EVERY PAINFUL LONELY **MOMENT** IS **CRISP** AND **CLEAR.**

I KNOW ALL THE **NAMES.** THEY ARE **SO SIMPLE.** THEY FIT TOGETHER LIKE **CHESS PIECES.**

STAR.

SHAFT.

FLAME.

CLAW.

WING.

STONE.

AND STICK.

MIGHTY STICK.

SENSEI SENT ME TO THEM WHEN THERE WAS NOTHING MORE HE COULD TEACH ME

THEY ARE THE SEVEN. I WANT TO BE THE EIGHTH.

STICK IS A NOBLE WARRIOR A SAINT WHO TALKS WITH UGLY WORDS--

--AND SMELLS AWFUL BUT SHINES SO BRIGHTLY IT HURTS ME TO LOOK AT HIM.

I CHOOSE THE SAI AS MY WEAPON AND WANT HIM TO CALL ME THAT.

HE CALLS ME SNOT.

MY BONES HURT. MY CHEST FEELS LIKE IT IS BLEEDING FROM THE INSIDE AND MY FEET ARE NUMB.

MY SAI ARE SLIPPERY IN MY HANDS, AND STICK TELLS ME I AM NOT TRYING HARD ENOUGH.

I STAND UP, ANGRY --

I AM SLOW AND STUPID, HE SAYS, AND I WILL NEVER LEARN

BUT HE LETS ME STAY FOR NOW AND I LOVE HIM

THEY TREAT ME LIKE A SLAVE. I COOK AND SERVE THE FOOD LIKE POPPA'S SERVANTS DID

SILENT HOURS GO BY THEN ONE OF THEM GRUNTS OR SAYS HALF A WORD AS IF THEY HAD BEEN TALKING ALL ALONG

SOMETIMES I HEAR THEM SPEAK WHEN THEIR LIPS DON'T MOVE.

I AM LEARNING THEIR MAGIC.

STICK KNOWS I HEAR BUT STILL ISN'T IMPRESSED

HE TELLS ME THE SOUP TASTES LIKE DUNG.

HE IGNORES ME AND SPEAKS WITHOUT TALKING TO THE OTHERS--ABOUT THE "HAND" AND THE "BEAST"--I DON'T UNDERSTAND--

I LOOK AT THE OTHERS AND FEEL JEALOUS--

--STICK CALLS ME A TERRIBLE NAME--

-I AM HAPPY JUST TO BE NEAR HIM ..

I WISH I COULD HEAR HIM TALK NOW...

.. BUT TO **HEAR** HIM I WOULD HAVE TO BE **THERE** AGAIN...

...ON THE **CLIFF**...

THOUGH I TRAIN FOR **MONTHS**-- THOUGH I LEARN TO CATCH A **BIRD** IN FLIGHT--

--AND LEAVE NO **FOOT-PRINTS** IN THE **SNOW**...

...THOUGH I NEVER FEEL THE **COLD** AND NEVER **SLEEP**...

..STICK CASTS ME **OUT**.

I **SHOW** HIM I AM **BRAVE**. I DO NOT **CRY** OR **ARGUE**.

I REACH **OUT** TO HIM...

..AND SAY **GOODBYE** WITHOUT **SPEAKING**.

I FEEL HIS **SURPRISE** THAT I HAVE LEARNED THE **SKILL** SO WELL.

THEN HIS **SOUL** BECOMES HARD AS THE **CLIFF**.

MY FAREWELL **SHATTERS** AGAINST HIM.

AND I FALL.

WHEN I DO NOT WANT TO **WATCH** THE GLOBES I SPIN THEM **FASTER**.

IF I AM NOT **CAREFUL** ENOUGH, PIECES FLY **OFF** AND **CLATTER** INTO EACH OTHER.

THEY **SPLINTER**--

--I AM **NINETEEN** YEARS OLD-- IN **COLLEGE**--

--**MATT** HOLDS ME --**FIRE** GROWS --

--I AM **NINETEEN** YEARS OLD--

--POPPA'S CHEST **EXPLODES**--

--HE **LEAVES** ME--

--**PUNISHES** ME--

--I AM--

--**NINETEEN**--

--**YEARS** OLD--

--**MATT**--

--I **LEAVE** HIM WHEN I **BURY** POPPA--

--I GO--

--I GO--

--**SENSEI**--

--**SENSEI** COUGHS BLOOD AND **DIES**--

--MY **WEAPON** IN HIS **HEART**--

--NO.

THAT PIECE-- THE **BLACK GLOBE** SNEAKED IT IN-- **SLIPPED** IT IN-- **TRICKED** ME--

--IT **WAITS**--**LAUGHS** AT ME --**TAUNTS** ME--**GLEAMS**-- ITS SURFACE IS SMEARED RUBY BLOOD **RED**-- IT WHISPERS **AWFUL** THINGS...

YOU ARE A TURTLE IT MOCKS ME YOU HIDE FROM YOUR POWER IT WHISPERS--

--IT CHUCKLES AND LICKS ME AND TALKS OF MAGIC--

--I CHASE IT AWAY.

I AM IN AN OFFICE WITH THE OTHER WOMEN--

--IN THE MADHOUSE --NOW--

--THE MAN IS FAT AND GREASY--

--HE SMELLS LIKE A--

--RAT--

YOU HIDE BUT YOU ARE NOT SAFE.

IT MURMURS

YOU ARE SOFT INSIDE BUT YOU HAVE JAWS.

THE RAT IS HUGE--

--BUT YOU HAVE JAWS--

THE RAT IS HUGE--

--FAT GREASY SPANISH--

--BUT I HAVE JAWS--

HIS THROAT IS SOFT.

MY FINGERS CUT THE FLOOR.

IT LAUGHS AT ME IT LAUGHS--

A RUSTLE OF DRY DEAD THINGS

YOU ARE MINE

IT SAYS

AN OCEAN OF CACKLING VOICES

IT ROARS

AND THE BLACK GLOBE OPENS.

AND I FALL.

HE WAS *DIFFICULT* TO CATCH, YES

BUT, ONCE *DRUGGED*, HE SERVED HIS PURPOSE

WELCOME ELEKTRA. WELCOME TO THE *HAND*.

"YOU BETRAYED YOUR *FATHER*," SAYS THE *JONIN*, "AND SO HE *DIED*."

...THE JONIN'S GIGGLE *ECHOES* THROUGH THE CATACOMBS. I AM *TWENTY YEARS OLD*...

"YOU LOVED YOUR *SENSEI*-- AND SO YOU HAVE *KILLED* H.M "

...TRICK. IT WAS A TRICK...

...BUT THERE YOU *LIE*, SENSEI...

"YOU ARE *TAINTED*, ELEKTRA. TAINTED WITH THE *BLOOD* OF EVERY GOOD MAN YOU HAVE *TOUCHED*."

..THE SNAKES *HISS*-- AT ONCE TOGETHER, IN TRIUMPH...

"*TAINTED*--OR SO THE WORLD *ABOVE* WOULD JUDGE YOU

"YET ,N YOUR HEART YOU KNOW THAT IT IS THE *WORLD* THAT IS TAINTED-- *POISONED* BY MAN'S *INVENTIONS* OF *LOVE* AND *HONOR*.

"YOU MAY *CONTINUE* AS A *VICTIM* OF YOUR OWN *PURITY*--

"--OR *EMBRACE* THE UNSULLIED *TRUTH*--

"--AND *LEARN* THE WAY OF THE *BEAST*.

THE *BEAST* IS *POWER*.

THE *BEAST* IS *MAGIC*.

THE *BEAST* WILL MAKE YOU *CLEAN*, ELEKTRA...

"THE BEAST IS NOT BORN OF MAN OR WOMAN.

"YET WITH EACH PASSING YEAR HE GROWS MORE HUMAN IN APPEARANCE. IN TIME HE WILL TAKE HIS PLACE IN THE WORLD ABOVE--

"--AND BRING IT TO ASHES.

"WE ARE HIS HAND..

"...CLAWING AT THE FOUNDATION OF MAN'S GREAT LIE... CLEARING THE PATH..."

BEHOLD THE LORD, ELEKTRA.

THE JACKAL'S SON.

THE BEAST.

"BE BRAVE.

"DO NOT THINK.

"NO--SEEK NO OTHER TO COMPARE WITH HIM...

"SEE HIM AS HE IS, ELEKTRA.

"SEE HIM. SMELL HIM...

"HE FAVORS YOU..

"..WITH HIS MOTHER'S MILK...

"..DRINK DEEP ELEKTRA..

"LET MIND AND SOUL GIVE WAY TO BONE AND BLOOD..."

FINALLY THE CHATTERING VOICES STOP..

...AND I--AM FILLED--

--WITH STENCH FOUL ROTTING SPOILED STENCH DRIPS FROM ME FILLS MY THROAT--

--THREE GENIN TO KILL ME--

THINKING --SO DIFFICULT--

THINKING --IS TOO SLOW--

--BLOOD FAST--

--SIX YEARS OLD--

--CAT--

--SMILE CAT--

--MY FAV--

--POPPA LAUGHS--

--CA--

FOR A TIME EVERYTHING SHINES.

...BUT THE SHINE IS HARD AND HOT AND HATEFUL AND MAKES ME EMPTY AND SICK AND NUMB.

I LEAVE THE MILK. I LEAVE THE HAND

THE JONIN TELLS ME I MUST DIE AND I LAUGH AT HIM.

I LAUGH AT THE BLACK GLOBE AND LEAVE IT.

IT LAUGHS BACK. IT TALKS LOUDLY AND VERY FAST.

I MUST DROWN IT OUT

BUT THEY HAVE LOCKED ME AWAY FROM THE OTHER GLOBES.

AND THE BLACK ONE HAS GROWN HUGE.

IT DOES NOT SHUT UP.

I AM SMALL AND BOUND

I COUNT THE BRICKS IN THIS CELL.

IT CHUCKLES--

--AND WAITS FOR ME TO FINISH COUNTING.

I TRICK IT. BEFORE I FINISH COUNTING I NOTICE MY ARMS HURT SO I MOVE THEM TO MAKE THEM HURT MORE.

THEY STOP HURTING SO I MOVE THEM AGAIN AND THE JACKET--

--THE STRAITJACKET --IT FALLS FROM ME, WHICH SHOULD NOT HAPPEN--

--AND THE BLACK GLOBE QUIVERS--

--I TOUCH THE FLOOR. IT IS COLD.

WITH MY OTHER HAND I TOUCH MY THIGH. IT IS COOL AND SOFT AND--

--IT IS NOT SOFT--

--THE BLACK GLOBE SHRINKS, VERY SUDDENLY --IT IS A LITTLE RUBBER BALL--IT BOUNCES BACK AND FORTH FROM WALL TO FLOOR TO CEILING TO WALL--

--NOT SOFT-- STITCHED. STITCHED CLOSED--

--AND INSIDE IT-- SOMETHING SHINES.

ONE BY ONE I PULL THEM OUT.

DEEP RED BLOOD OOZES FROM ME --FLASHES IN THE LIGHT.

THE FLASHING PARTS BEGIN TO SHINE.

THE BLACK GLOBE SCREAMS.

I AM TWENTY-FOUR YEARS OLD.

I AM IN SOUTH AMERICA...

...CIGARETTE SMOKE...

...A DIRTY ROOM. A HOTEL ROOM..

...A VOICE LIKE GRAVEL...

"DEFEAT SM IS DEAD IN SAN CONCEPCION SAYS THE AMER CAN AMBASSADOR

"THE PROUD SPIRIT OF THE PEOPLE HAS BEEN REKINDLED BY THE VISION OF CARLOS HUEVOS."

.. A COUGH. BROWN SPIT SPLATTERS ON THE WOOD FLOOR...

BASTARD.

W TH AMER CA

...WITH EVERY COUNTRY THAT WANTS GUNS AND TANKS TO BUY AND SELL--

--TO SNEAK ACROSS OUR BORDERS FOR CONVEN,ENT WARS--

--HUEVOS HAS MADE SAN CONCEPCION AS POPULAR AS A TWO DOLLAR WHORE.

..CHEAP WHISKEY SWALLOWED FAST...

THE SONS OF FARMERS DIE IN PO SON FACTORIES-

--THEIR DAUGHTERS FEAR THEIR OWN POLICE...

I M TOLD YOU SERVED IN BOLIVIA. AS A MERCENARY.

THAT YOU EMPLOYED NINJA TECHNIQUES

I WANT YOU TO KILL HUEVOS.

WHAT WILL IT TAKE?

MONEY.

TWO DOLLARS

BURSTS OF LIGHT--

--CAMERAS--

--REPORTERS--

--AN AMUSEMENT PARK--

--MERRY GO ROUND--

--CARLOS HUEVOS, SPINNING--

--ANOTHER RIDE SPINNING--

--CARLOS HUEVOS, SPINNING--

K-KTANNG!

--THREE DAYS--

--A DEEP VOICE, PROUD LIKE POPPA'S...

...A SIMPLE GRAVE, AS HE INSISTED...

...YES, I AM AT THE FUNERAL OF CARLOS HUEVOS...

TO SEE THE MOURNERS.

BUT SOMETHING--

--SOMETHING WRONG--

...A SIMPLE GRAVE, FOR A SIMPLE MAN...

...WHO FEARED HIS GOD, AND LOVED HIS PEOPLE.

--SOMETHING IN THE AIR--

--GROWING THICK--

--AMBASSADOR REICH--

THOUGH WE MAY FEEL IN THE FACE OF THIS MAD ACT...

...THAT OUR WORLD IS HOPELESS..

..LET US FIND STRENGTH IN THE COURAGE OF CARLOS HUEVOS..

--IT COMES FROM AMBASSADOR REICH--

--THICKER STILL--

--I CANNOT BREATHE--

--MY KNEES-- ARE JELLY--

--HANDS -- TRYING TO PULL ME BACK-- FROM THE MEMORY--

--NO--THEY CANNOT--

--I REMEMBER--

--AT THE FUNERAL OF CARLOS HUEVOS-- I ALMOST VOMIT--

--AMBASSADOR REICH--FILLS THE AIR--

--WITH THE STENCH OF THE BEAST.

--THE SPANISH MEN--THEY TIE ME DOWN--

--THEY CANNOT --STOP MY MIND--

--THE BEAST-- COULD HE HAVE BECOME SO HUMAN--SO SOON?

NO. THE PRIESTS WERE CERTAIN. THE PROCESS REQUIRES YEARS --A DOZEN MORE.

--THAT NIGHT --THAT SAME NIGHT--

--I GO TO THE AMERICAN EMBASSY--

--SECONDS FOR THE GATE--

--SECONDS MORE--A SIMPLE BLOW--

--HE SLEEPS--

--ANOTHER--

--I LEAVE HIM BREATHING--

--NOW--IT COMES IN A CURDLED WAVE--

--THE NIGHT AIR--DOES NOT ENTER WITH ME--

--CREAKING WHEELS ON CEMENT FLOOR--

--IN THE MADHOUSE-- THE SPANISH MEN--

--THEY PUSH THE CART--

--ONE TOUCHES ME--RUNS SWEATY FINGERS UP MY LEG--

--BUT THAT IS UNIMPORTANT. I MUST REMEMBER-- THE EMBASSY--

--THE AMBASSADOR-- STARES AT ME--BUT DOES NOT CARE...

--THE AMBASSADOR-- THE STENCH DOES NOT COME FROM HIM--

--HERE--THIS IS WHERE--

--WHERE IT--

--THE STENCH DOES NOT COME FROM HIM--

--IT COMES-- FROM THE MILK--

--NOW--

--A RUSH OF DISPLACED, FOULED AIR--

-A BUBBLING SNICKER--

--A RASPING LUNG--

--A SINGLE BASS DRUM HEARTBEAT--

--FOR ME A TARGET.

THUNK

--SOMEWHERE-- FAR AWAY--

-- THE JONIN GIGGLES--

--HERE--AT THE EMBASSY--

--THERE IS NO AIR--

--MY MUSCLES --HANG FROM MY BONES--

--I RUN--

--SLOWLY, THROUGH LIQUID--

--MADHOUSE--

--CLATTER OF SHARP TOOLS--

--NOT THE PUNISHING MACHINES--

--SOMETHING NEW--

--UNIMPORTANT--

--I MUST REMEMBER--

--MADHOUSE--

--SOMETHING-- ON MY FACE--

--UNIMPORTANT--

--EMBASSY--

--BEAST--

--MILK--

--TOO MUCH--

--MILK--

--NOW--

--HERE--

--IN THE MADHOUSE--

--GAS--

HHISSSSS

--NOW-- HERE--

--IN THE MADHOUSE--

--I UNDERSTAND--

SSSHHHH

HHHISSSSSSSSSSSS

--I HAVE FOUGHT THE BEAST.

HE FORCED ME AGAIN TO DRINK THE MILK.

TOO MUCH.

IT SHATTERED MY MIND.

HE LET ME LIVE. I DO NOT KNOW WHY.

HE SENT ME HERE--

--WHERE THE FOOD TASTES AWFUL AND BODIES PRESS TOO CLOSELY--

--WHERE MACHINES SPUTTER AND OILY MEN LEER AND TOUCH ME--

--I ALMOST LAUGH. THE GAS CANNOT DULL ME IF I DO NOT BREATHE.

THE STRAPS THAT BIND ME ARE SIMPLE, STUPID THINGS.

THE MAN IS BONE AND JELLY.

I NEED ONLY SHOVE ONE INTO THE OTHER.

THE WOMAN IS A FAT, FEARFUL RABBIT.

I AM A COBRA.

EGGSHELL SKULL SPLINTERS--

--SHAKING--
I AM WEAK--

--KNIVES--
THEY WERE ABOUT TO CUT MY BRAIN--

THE OTHER MAN--HAS A GUN--

--BUT HIS EYES ARE SOFT.

MY HEART POUNDS SHAMEFULLY--HOW LONG HAVE THEY HELD ME?

UNIMPORTANT.

THE GUARDS AND FENCE BELOW WILL GIVE WAY BEFORE ME LIKE A THICKET IN A HURRICANE.

OF COURSE I SHOULD NOT LEAVE JUST YET.

LEAVE NOTHING ALIVE. IT IS THE FIRST ORDER.

BUT THE WIND IS HOT AND WET AND RIPE WITH SPRING.

AND
I
JUMP.